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Concept paper
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While I was not an attendee at the first Minnowbrook conference 50 years ago, I was deeply involved in the issues that had motivated the meeting. As I wrote about it for the 2nd Minnowbrook meeting, the first conference was often described as the realization that the academics who were looking at the demonstrations in the street from their academic perches were feeling guilty about their absence from the action. That was not my issue. From 1961 on, I had been involved in the civil rights movement both in the street and as a staff member of the US Commission on Civil Rights. By 1968, many things had changed and a malaise and depression followed the results of the 1968 election. My personal response to that environment in Washington was to leave town by starting a PhD program in Social Policy Planning at the University of California at Berkeley.

In many ways the mood of Washington today mirrors those feelings. But I'm too old to start over. Instead, I'm trying to figure out what the world of public management and policy has been doing that contributed to the state that we are in today. What have we done (or failed to do) that has supported the erosion of the public sector that we have all been studying and, in the process, trying to advance suggestions for improvement?

Increasingly I come back to one of the most basic issues in our field: the difference between the public sector and the private sector. What are the differences between the two and what can we expect from each of them? This is a question that is found recurrently in the history of public management. Attempts to sort out the similarities and differences between the two sectors are found in a wide range of journals

and books. The exchange takes many different forms as it responds to developments within the society that generate skepticism about one or the other of the two sectors.

While some have attempted to sort out clear roles for the two, others have found that there is a dynamic process that creates pendulum swings related to changes in the environment (technological, social and economic) that move public views from one sector to the other. Albert Hirschman called this “shifting involvements” and wrote that they occur when the public is disappointed with one or the other sector.

While this framework is appealing, it seems to me that we have focused on a range of approaches and issues that seems to have stuck us in a place where the unique attributes and values of the public sector have been lost. I find that the triad of efficiency, effectiveness and equity (generating the need to trade off between them) has been replaced by a deference only to efficiency. Over the past several decades we have lost much of the complicated identity of the public sector.

I have identified five areas that I feel have suffered from this loss. While as academics we cannot require decisionmakers to move the pendulum to include issues that reflect effectiveness and equity values as well as efficiency values, our work can point to the consequences of the overwhelming move to adopt policies and practices from the private sector.

1. *The impact of the increase in contracting out programs and services.* We should remind ourselves of the consequences of contracting out programs and services. As Joseph Califano once said, “HHS doesn’t deliver services. It delivers dollars and regulations.” We know that this has led to the hollow state but we have lost sight of the substantive consequences of block grants and disappearance of the

federal government in the design and evaluation of programs. It is one thing to substitute private sector contracts for products available on the market but it is quite different to contract out the actual services paid for by federal government dollars. We rarely point to this difference in our evaluation of programs and, instead, hold federal employees accountable for services that are beyond their control.

2. *Financial issues appear to drive everything.* Discussion of programs is almost always in budget terms. Even though we don't have a clear alternative to the profit motive we seem to have decided to ignore assessments that include both effectiveness and equity goals.
3. *Performance definitions seem to be directly borrowed from the private sector and fail to reflect attributes of the public sector role.* There seems to be an assumption that individual bureaucrats have the ability to have an impact on program outcomes and that information about outputs and processes are not important measures of performance. There is minimal attention to performance measures that reflect goals related to due process or transparency issues. These are objectives that are often very difficult to quantify.
4. *Increasingly studies and research efforts ignore the reality of politics, particularly the way that the unstable external environment has an impact on the quality of government work.* There is a tendency for researchers to move to a micro behavioral level which sometimes appears to be like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. At the same time, a number of research efforts seem to demean

the effectiveness of incremental strategies since they don't appear to have significant impact on reaching the program goals.

5. *There is a tendency for researchers to ignore the constitutional complexity of the US system.* This complexity includes shared powers between the three branches of government as well as federalism issues. This reinforces the tendency in the field to focus only on the powers within the executive branch and thus repeat strategies that have not been effective in the past (e.g. reorganization and other management reform efforts).